



Washington State Senate

The Benton Bulletin

17TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT UPDATE FROM SENATOR DON BENTON

MARCH 24, 2005

Dear Friends,

As always, it is my pleasure to report to you about what is happening in your state Capitol during the regular 105-day legislative session, which at this point, is two-thirds complete.

It is my privilege and duty to keep my constituents informed. However, I would like to be cost-conscious as well. **If you can receive the Benton Bulletin via e-mail**, please e-mail me at benton.don@leg.wa.gov and put "Benton Bulletin" in the subject line. Please include your name and address in the body of the e-mail so I can remove you from the snail mail list.

PROTECTING SCHOOLCHILDREN

In my previous update, I reported to you that the chairwoman of the Senate Early Learning, K-12 and Higher Education Committee killed my proposal to protect schoolchildren from predatory teachers. I am pleased to announce that with persistence, I was able to pull a rabbit out of the hat to resurrect this bill last week on the floor of the state Senate. I amended the language of my proposal to a very unassuming piece of legislation, Senate Bill 5983, which ultimately passed the Senate unanimously! The bill is now in the House Education Committee for further consideration, where my discussions with the committee chairman have been positive.

GUTTING I-601 – THE STATE SPENDING LIMIT

Last week, the Democrat majority gutted the last vestiges of the voter-approved state spending limit. **Senate Bill 6078 allows the Legislature to raise taxes by only a simple majority vote instead of the two-thirds vote required under I-601.** To make matters worse, this measure contains an emergency clause making it effective immediately upon being signed by the governor, prohibiting it from being subject to a referendum by the people.

"Welcome to Democrat control of the government. First thing they're doing is destroying 601...an initiative the people put in place to protect themselves from an overzealous government." – **Don Benton**, R-Vancouver, announced on the Senate floor while debating Senate Bill 6078.

BOGUS ELECTION REFORM

Efforts by the Senate Democrat leadership to "reform" Washington's election system totally miss the mark. While debating and considering this legislation on the Senate floor, I offered several amendments that I believe would have gotten to the core of the very problems plaguing our election system. Every amendment was systematically shot down by the Senate Democrats:

- Requires the secretary of state to cross-check the statewide voter database against other state databases (like the Department of Corrections for felons and Department of Health for the deceased) to determine voter eligibility.
- Makes the use of private mailbox companies, like Mailboxes Etc., an illegitimate voter address for place of residence.
- Requires voters to show photo identification in order to vote.
- Requires county auditors to reconcile the number of ballots counted with the number of voters voting prior to election certification and requires a revote within 60 days if the total number of ballots without voters exceeds the margin of victory.



Senator
Don Benton

Committee assignments:

- Financial Institutions, Housing & Consumer Protection, ranking Republican
- Government Operations & Elections

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THE GOVERNOR’S BUDGET

Early this week, Gov. Gregoire proposed a two-year, \$25.8 billion state operating budget, an 11 percent increase over the current budget. The dramatically improved state revenue forecast made the job much easier, adding an estimated \$700 million to the state’s coffers. The governor “solves” the remaining \$1.5 billion budget gap with the following:

- \$203 million in tax increases (reimplementing a portion of the estate tax declared unconstitutional by our state Supreme Court, and a 20-cent-per-pack increase in the cigarette tax)
- \$591 million in shifts, transfers and new revenue (I call this smoke and mirrors – it does not represent any real solutions)
- \$524 million in delaying pension funding until future biennia (a dangerous trick to play with money the state is forgoing in investment gains and will ultimately have to pay)
- \$381 million in cuts and not granting increases

Unfortunately, the governor’s proposed budget fails to address the fastest growing areas of the state budget:

- **Pension costs**, over \$500 million worth, are deferred. One available remedy – terminating gain-sharing – is not employed. Skipping contributions raises

legal questions about whether the state is meeting its contractual obligation to fund pensions.

- **Health care** grows at double-digit inflation. No innovative policies are offered by the governor. Instead, more costs are put on taxpayers by stopping efforts aimed at identifying ineligible recipients, eliminating modest co-premiums, and providing access for noncitizens and illegal immigrants for state-funded health care programs.
- **Bilingual education** costs are growing nearly three times the rate of state revenues. The percent of students on the program more than three years has tripled in recent years and the percent that are on more than five years has quadrupled. No proposals are offered by the governor to address this growth problem.

Again, it is my pleasure to provide you a brief update throughout the legislative session. Once more, if you are able to receive these updates via e-mail, I encourage you to help me cut costs. As always, it is my pleasure to serve you. Please don’t hesitate to contact me or visit me during session in Olympia any time.

Sincerely,

DON BENTON
State Senator, 17th District

Please use this space for any comments, suggestions or problems you would like me to know about. Or call the toll-free Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000.



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